

# CHRIST'S CURATE IN DECAPOLIS

*"And they began to pray Him to depart out of their coasts. And when He was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed Him that he might be with Him. However, Jesus suffered him not, but said unto him, Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you."*

*Mark 5:17-19*

THAT is a striking name for a man, "he that had been possessed with the devil." It would stick to him as long as he lived and it would be a standing sermon wherever he went. He would be asked to tell the story of what he used to be and how the change came about. What a story for any man to tell! It would not be possible for us to describe his life while he was a demoniac—the midnight scenes among the tombs, the cutting himself with stones, the howling, the frightening away of all the travelers that went near him, the binding with chains, the snapping of the manacles, the breaking of the fetters—and a great many details that he, alone, could enter into when he told the story among his own familiar friends. With what tenderness would he tell how Jesus came that way and how the evil spirit forced him to confront Him! He would say, "That was the best thing that could have happened to me, to be brought to the Master of that desperate legion of demons which had encamped within my nature and made my soul to be its barracks." He would tell how, in a moment, out went the whole legion at the word of Christ!

There are some people who could tell a story very similar to this man's—a story of slavery to Satan and deliverance by the power of Christ! If you can tell such a story, do not keep it to yourself! If Jesus has done great things for you, be always ready to speak of it, till all men shall know what Christ can do. I think that great sinners who have been saved are especially called upon to publish the good news, the Gospel of the Grace of God. If you have been valiant against the Truth of God, be valiant for the Truth of God. If you were not lukewarm when you served Satan, be not lukewarm, now that you have come to serve Christ! There are some of us here who might bear the name of "the man who was born blind," or, "the leper that was healed," or, "the woman that was a sinner." And I hope that we shall all be willing to take any name or any title that will glorify Christ. I do not find that this man ever persecuted Mark for libel because he wrote of him as, "he that had been possessed with the devil." Oh, no! He acknowledge that he was once possessed with the devil—and he glorified God that he had been delivered by the Lord Jesus!

1. I am going to make a few observations upon the passage I have chosen for a text—and the first observation is this, SEE HOW MEN'S DESIRES DIFFERED. We find in the 17 th verse that, "they began to pray Him to depart out of theircoasts." In the 18 th verse, "he that had been possessed with the devil prayed Him that he might be with Him." The peopwanted Christ to go away from them—the man whom He had cured wanted to go wherever He might go! To which class do you belong, my dear Friend?

I hope you do not belong to the first class, the class of the many who pray Jesus to depart from them. Why did they want Him to go?

I think it was, first, because they loved to be quiet and to dwell at ease. It was a great calamity that had happened—the swine had run into the sea. They did not want any more such calamities and evidently the Person who had come among them possessed extraordinary power. Had He not healed the demoniac? Well, they did not want Him—they did not want anything extraordinary.

They were easy-going men who would like to go on in the even tenor of their ways, so they asked Him to be good enough to go away. There are some people of that kind still living. They say, "We do not need a revival, here—we are too respectable. We do not need any stirring preaching here—we are very comfortable. Do not break up our peace." Such men, when they think that God is at work in any place, are half inclined to go elsewhere. They want to be quiet! Their motto is, "Anything for a quiet life." "Leave us alone, let us go on our old way," is the cry of these foolish people, as it was the cry of the Israelites when they said to Moses, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians."

Possibly these people wanted the Savior gone because they had an eye to business. That keeping of the swine was a bad business. As Jews, they had no business with it. They may have said they did not eat them—themselves, they only kept them for other people to eat—but now they had lost the whole herd! I wonder what all those swine would have brought to their owners? As they began calculating how much they had lost, they resolved that the Savior must get out of their coasts before they lost anything more. I do not wonder that, when men sell intoxicating liquors, for instance, or when they follow any trade in which they cannot make money except by injuring their fellow men, they do not want Christ to come that way. Perhaps some of you would not like Him to see you pay those poor women for making shirts. I am afraid if Jesus Christ were to come around and go into some people's business houses, the husband would say to his wife, "Fetch down that book where I enter the wages and hide it—I should not like Him to see that."

Oh, dear Friend, if there is any such reason why you do not want Christ to come your way, I pray that the Holy Spirit may convince you that you do need Him to come your way! He who has the most objection to Christ is the man who most needs Christ! You can be sure of this—if you do not desire to be converted, if you do not wish to be born again—you are the person above all others needing to be converted and to be born again! Is it not a most unwise decision when, for the sake of swine, we are willing to part with Christ? "For what shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" He will get a corner in the newspaper saying that he died worth so many thousands of pounds—and that will not be true, for he was never worth a penny! Who would give a penny for him, now he is dead? He will cost money to get rid of and he cannot not take it with him. He was not worth anything—he used his money for selfish purposes and never used it for the glory of God. Oh, the poverty of an ungodly rich man!

I do not wonder that these people, taken up with themselves, and with the world, prayed Christ "to depart out of their coasts." May He not, even though you may not care to hear Him, stop somewhere on the shore? No—when men get excited against religion they go to great lengths in trying to drive it away from their midst. Many a poor man has lost his cottage where he had a few Prayer Meetings because the landlord not only did not want Christ, Himself, but, like the dog in the manger, would not let others have Him who did want Him. Are any of you in that condition?

I hope that I have some here who are of another kind—like this poor man who prayed Him that he might be with Him. Why did he want to be with Jesus? I think he wanted to be His attendant to show his gratitude. If he might but wait on Christ, loose the laces of His shoes and wash His feet, or prepare His meals, he would feel himself the happiest man on earth! He would love to be doing something for the One who had cast a legion of devils out of him!

Next, he wished not only to be an attendant to show his gratitude, but a disciple that he might learn more of Him. What he did know of Christ was so precious—he had personally had such an experience of His gracious power that he wanted to be always learning something from every word of those dear lips, and every action of those blessed hands! He prayed Him that he might be with Him as a disciple who wished to be taught by Him.

He also wanted to be with Him as a comrade, for now that Christ must go, exiled from Decapolis, he seemed to feel that there was no reason why he should remain there. "Lord, if You must leave there Gadarenes, let me leave the Gadarenes, too! Do you go, O Shepherd? Then let me go with You. Must You cross the sea and go, I know not where? I will go with You to prison and to death!" He felt so linked with Christ that he prayed Him that he might be with Him.

I think that there was this reason, also—one of fear at the back of his prayer. Perhaps one of that legion of devils might come back—and if he could stay with Christ, then Christ would turn the devil out again! I should not wonder but he felt a trembling about him, as if he could not bear to be out of the sight of the great Physician who had healed him of so grievous an ill. I would say to all here that we are never safe unless we are with Christ. If you are tempted to go where you could not have Christ with you, do not go!

Did you ever hear the story of the devil running away with a young man who was at the theater? It is said that John Newton sent after Satan and said, “That young man is a member of my Church.” “Well,” replied the devil, “I do not care where he is a member! I found him on my premises, and I have a right to him.” And the preacher could not give any answer to that. If you go on the devil’s premises and he takes you, I cannot say anything against it. Go nowhere where you cannot take Christ with you! Be like this man who longs to go wherever Christ goes.

II. Now, secondly, SEE HOW CHRIST’S DEALINGS DIFFER and how extraordinary they are. Here is an evil prayer—“Depart out of our coasts.” He grants it. Here is a pious prayer—“Lord, let me be with You.” “However Jesus suffered him not.” Is that His way, to grant the prayer of His enemies, and refuse the petition of His friends? Yes, it is sometimes.

In the first case, when they prayed Him to depart, He went. Oh, dear Friends, if Christ ever comes near you and you get a little touched in your conscience and feel a throb of something like spiritual life, do not pray Him to go away, for if He goes—if He should leave you to yourself and never return—your doom is sealed! Your only hope lies in His Presence, but if you pray against your one Hope, you are a suicide—you are guilty of murdering your own soul!

Jesus went away from these people because it was useless to stay. If they wanted Him to go, what good could He do to them? If He spoke, they would not listen. If they heard His message, they would not heed it. When men’s minds are set against Christ, what else is to be done but to leave them?

He could spend His time better somewhere else. If you will not have my Lord, somebody else will. If you sit there in your pride and say, “I need not the Savior,” there is a poor soul in the gallery longing for Him and crying, “Oh, that I might find Him to be my Savior!” Christ knew that if the Gadarenes refused Him, the people on the other side of the lake would welcome Him on His return.

By going away, He even saved them from yet greater sin. If He had not gone, they might have tried to plunge Him into the lake. When men begin to pray Christ to depart out of their coasts, they are bad enough for anything. There might have followed violence to His blessed Person, so He took Himself away from them. Is it not an awful thing that if the Gospel ministry does not save you, it is helping to damn you? We are a savor to God, always sweet—but in some men, we are a savor of death unto death—while in others we are a savor unto life. O my Hearers, if you will not come to Christ, the seat you occupy is misappropriated! There might be another person sitting here to whom the Gospel might be very precious—and our opportunities of preaching it are none too many. We do not like to waste our strength on stony ground, on hard bits of rock that repel the Seed. Rock, rock, rock, will you never break? Must we continue to sow you though no harvest comes from you? God change you, rock, and make you good soil, that yet the Truth of God may grow upon you! The evil prayer, then, was answered.

The good prayer was not answered. Why was that? The chief reason was because the man could be useful at home. He could glorify God better by going among the Gadarenes and among his own family and telling what God had done for him, than he could by any attention he could pay to Christ. It is remarkable that Christ took nobody to be His bodyservant, or personal attendant during His earthly ministry. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister! He did not desire this man to be with Him to make Him comfortable—He bade him go back to his family and make known the power of Jesus Christ and seek to win them for God.

Perhaps, too, his prayer was not answered lest his fear should have been thereby sanctioned. If he did fear and I feel morally certain that he did—that the devils would return—then, of course, he longed to be with Christ. But Christ took that fear from him and, as good as says to him, “You do not need to be near Me—I have so healed you that you will never be sick again.” A patient might say to his doctor, “I have been so very ill and through your skill have been restored to health, I should like to be near you, so that if there should be any recurrence of my malady, I might come to you at once.” If the doctor should reply, “You may go to Switzerland, or to Australia, if you like,” it would be the best evidence that the doctor had no fears about him—and it ought to put a quietus to his doubts.

You see, then, how Christ’s dealings differ with different men. Have I not known some continue in sin and yet prosper in business, heaping up wealth and having all that heart could wish? Have I not known others repent and turn to God—and from that very day they have had more trouble than they ever had before—and their way has been strangely rough? Yes, I have seen them and I have not envied the easy ways of the wicked, neither have I felt that there was anything very amazing about the rough ways of the righteous, for, after all, it is not the way that is the all-important matter—it is the end of the way—and if I could travel smoothly to Hell, I would not choose to do so! And if the way to eternal life is rough, I take it with all its roughness! At the foot of the Hill Difficulty, Bunyan makes his pilgrim sing—

*“The hill, though high, I covet to ascend,  
The difficulty will not me offend;  
For I perceive the way of life lies here.”*

III. My third point is this—SEE HOW GOOD A THING IT IS TO BE WITH JESUS. This man entreated of the Lord that he might be with Him.

If you have recently been saved, I expect you have a longing in your heart to always be with Christ. I will tell you what shape that longing is likely to take. You were so happy, so joyful, and it was such a blessed meeting, that you said to yourself, “I am sorry it is over; I should like this meeting to have been kept on all night, and the next day, and never to end.” Yes, you were of the mind of Peter when he wanted to build the three tabernacles on the holy mountain and to stay there the rest of his days! But you cannot do it—it is no use wishing for it. You must go home to that drinking husband or that scolding wife—to that ungodly father or that unkind mother. You cannot always stay in that meeting!

Perhaps you have another idea of what it is to be with Christ. You are so happy when you can get alone and read your Bible and meditate, and pray, that you say, “Lord, I wish I could always be like this. I should like to be always upstairs in this room, searching the Scriptures and having communion with God.” Yes, yes, yes, but you cannot do it. There are the children’s socks to be mended, there are buttons to be put on the husband’s shirts, and there are all sorts of odds and ends to be done and you must not neglect any of them! Whatever household duties come upon you, attend to them. You wish that you had not to go to the city tomorrow. Would it not be sweet to have an all-night Prayer Meeting and then to have an all-day searching of the Scriptures? No doubt it would, but the Lord has not so arranged it. You have to go to business, so just put on your week-day clothes and think yourself none the less happy because you have to show your religion in your daily life.

“Ah, well!” says one, and this I hear often, “I think that I would always be with Christ if I could get right out of business and give myself up to the service of the Lord.” Especially do you think that it would be so if you were a minister! Well, I have nothing to say against the ministry of the Gospel. If the Lord calls you to do it, obey the call and be thankful that He has counted you faithful, putting you into the ministry. But if you suppose that you will be nearer to Christ simply by entering the ministry, you are very much mistaken! I daresay that I had about as many of the other people’s troubles brought to me this morning, after I had done the preaching, as would last most men a month! We have to bear with everybody’s trouble, and everybody’s doubt, and

everybody's need of comfort and counsel! You will find yourself cumbered with much serving, even in the service of the Lord—and it is very easy to lose the Master in the Master's work!

We need much Grace lest this insidious temptation should overcome us even in our ministry. You can walk with Christ and sell groceries! You can walk with Christ and be a chimney-sweep. I do not hesitate to say that, by the Grace of God, you can walk with Christ as well in one occupation as another, if it is a rightful one. It might be quite a mistake if you were to give up your business under the notion that you would be more with Christ if you became a city missionary, or a Bible-woman, or a tract distributor, or a captain in the Salvation Army, or whatever other form of holy service you might desire! Keep on with your business! If you can black shoes well, do that! If you can preach sermons badly, do not do that!

“Ah,” says one, “I know how I would like to be with Christ.” Yes, yes, I know. You would like to be in Heaven. Oh, yes, and it is a laudable desire, to wish to be with Christ, for it is far better than being here! But, mind you, it may be a selfish desire and it may be a sinful desire if it is pushed too far. A holy man of God was once asked by a fellow servant of Christ. “Brother So-and-So, do you not want to go Home?” He said, “I will answer you by another question. If you had a man working for you and, on Wednesday, he said, ‘I wish it were Saturday,’ would you keep him on?” The other thought that he would need a large stock of patience to do so. Why? You will be glad to see the back of him before Saturday comes, for he will be no good for work! Have I a right to be desiring to go to Heaven if I can do any good to you here? Is it not more of a Heaven to be outside of Heaven than inside if you can be doing more for God outside than in? Long to go when the Lord wills! But if not, to remain in the flesh is more for the good of the Church and the world, and more for the Glory of God—waive your desire and be not vexed with your Master when, after having prayed that you may be with Him, it has to be written of you as it was of this man—“However, Jesus suffered him not.”

Still, it is a very delightful thing to be with Jesus.

IV. But now, in the fourth place, SEE THAT THERE MAY BE SOMETHING EVEN BETTER THAN THIS. In the sense which I have mentioned, there is something better, even, than being with Christ!

What is better than being with Christ? Why, to be working for Christ! Jesus said to this man, “Go home to your friends and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.”

This is more honorable. It is very delightful to sit at Jesus' feet, but if the most honorable post on the field of battle is the place of danger. If the most honorable thing in the State is to have royal service allotted to you, then the most honorable thing for a Christian is not to sit down and sing, and enjoy himself, but to get up and risk reputation, life and everything for Jesus Christ's sake! Dear Friend, aspire to serve our Lord—it is a more honorable thing, even, than being with Him!

It is also better for the people. Christ is going away from the Gadarenes. They have asked Him to go and He is going. But He seems to say to this man, “I am going because they have asked Me to go. My leaving them looks like a judgment upon them for their rejection of Me, but yet I am not going away altogether. I am going to stay with you. I will put My Spirit upon you and so will continue with you. They will hear you though they will not hear Me.” Christ, as it were, resigns the pastorate of that district, but He puts another in His place, not as good as Himself, but one whom they will like better. Not as powerful and useful as Himself, but one better adapted to them. When Christ was gone, this man would be there and the people would come to him to hear about those swine and how they ran down into the sea. And if they did not come to him, he would go and tell them all about it. And so there would be a permanent curate left there to discharge the sacred ministry, now that the great Bishop had gone! I like that thought. Christ had gone to Heaven, for He is needed there, and so He has left you here, dear Brother, to carry on His work! You are not equal to Him in any respect, but yet remember what He said to His disciples, “He that believes on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do because I go unto My Father.” That is why Christ does not suffer you to be with Him at present. You must stay

for the sake of the people among whom you live, as, “He that had been possessed with the devil” had to remain for the sake of the Gadarenes, to whom he might testify concerning Christ!

His remaining, also, was better for his family, and do you not think that, oftentimes, a man of God is kept out of Heaven for the sake of his family? You must not go yet, Father—those boys still need your example and your influence. Christian Mother, you must not go yet—I know that your children are grown up and they are grieving you very much, but still, if there is any check upon them, it is their poor old mother—and you must stay till you have prayed them to God. And you will do so yet! Be of good courage! I believe that there are many here who might be in Heaven—but God has some who He intends to bring in by them—and so they must stay here a little longer. Though infirm in body, shattered in nerve and often racked with acute pain—perhaps with deadly disease upon you and wishing to be gone—you must not go till your work is done.

“However, Jesus suffered him not.” This demoniac must go home and tell his wife and his children what great things the Lord had done for him. Many eminent preachers have pictured the scene of his going home, so I will try to do it. You may only fancy what it would be if it were your case and you had been shut up in an asylum, or had been almost too bad even for that! How glad your friends were to have you taken away and then how much more glad to find you come back perfectly well! I can imagine how the man’s wife would look through the window when she heard his voice. Has he come back in a mad fit? How the children will be filled with terror at the sound of their father’s voice until they were assured that there was, indeed, a change in him! Ah, poor Sinner, you have come here tonight! Perhaps you forget that your children often have to hide away under the bed when Father comes home. I know that there are such persons about and they may even find their way into the Tabernacle. The Lord have mercy upon the drunk and turn his cups bottom upwards and make a new man of him! Then, when he goes home, to tell of Free Grace and dying love, and of the wonderful change that God has worked in him, he will be a blessing to his family and to all about him. It may be, dear Friend, that you have to stay here till you have undone some of the mischief of your early life. You have to bring to God some of those whom you tempted and led astray and helped to ruin.

So, you see, dear Friends, there is even something better than being with Christ—working for Christ.

1. But lastly, CONSIDER THAT THERE IS YET A CASE WHICH IS BEST OF ALL. We must always have three degrees of comparison. What is the best state of all? To be with Christ is good. To be sent by Christ on a holy errand is better. But here is something that is best of all, namely, to work for Him and to be with Him at the same time! I want every Christian to aspire to that position. Is it possible to sit with Mary at the Master’s feet and yet to run about like Martha and get the dinner ready? It is! And then Martha will never be cumbered with much serving if she does that—and she will never find fault with her sister Mary. “But, Sir, we cannot sit and stir at the same time.” No, not as to your bodies, but you can as to you souls! You can be sitting at Jesus’ feet, or leaning on His breast and yet be fighting the Lord’s battles and doing His work!

In order to do this, cultivate the inner as well as the outer life. Endeavor not only to do much for Christ, but to be much with Christ and to live wholly upon Christ. Do not, for instance, on the Lord’s-Day, go to a class and teach others three times, as some whom I know, do. But come once and hear the Master’s message and get your soul fed—and when you have had a spiritual feast in the morning, give the rest of the day to holy service. Let the two things run together! To be always eating and never working, will bring on excessive fullness and spiritual indigestion! To be always working and never eating—well, I am afraid that you will not bear that trial so well as the gentleman who yesterday ate his first meal after forty days of fasting. Do not try to imitate him! It is not a right and wise thing to do, but very dangerous. Get spiritual food as well as do spiritual work.

Let me say to you, again, grieve very much if there is the least cloud between you and Christ. Do not wait until it is as thick as a November fog—be full of sorrow if it is only like a tiny, fleecy cloud!

George Muller's observation was a very wise one, "Never come out of your chamber in the morning until everything is right between you and God." Keep in perpetual fellowship with Jesus and thus you can be with Him and yet be serving Him at the same time!

And mind this, before you begin Christ's service, always seek His Presence and help. Do not enter upon any work for the Lord without having first seen the face of the King in His beauty. And in the work, often, in your mind, remember what you are doing for Him—and by whom you are doing it! And when the work is completed, do not throw up your cap and say, "Well done, Self!" Another will say to you, by-and-by, "Well done!" if you deserve it. Do not take the words out of his mouth. Self-praise is no recommendation! Solomon said, "Let another man praise you and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips."

When we have done all, we are still unprofitable servants—we have only done that which is our duty to do. So, if you are as humble as you are active, as lowly as you are energetic, you may stay with Christ and yet go about His errands to the ends of the earth! And I reckon this to be the happiest experience that any one of us can reach this side of the gates of pearl. The Lord bless you and bring you there, for Christ's sake! Amen.